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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 003574

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SUBJECT: UNION OF RIGHT FORCES: WHO IS RIGHT?

REF: MOSCOW 03352

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reasons: 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The public display of disaffection between the Union of Right Forces (SPS) national leadership and the party's Moscow organization has momentarily captured the attention of the media. In retaliation for voting to confirm President Putin's re-appointment of Moscow mayor Luzhkov, the national party expelled from Moscow SPS ranks the only SPS member serving on the Moscow City Duma. The expulsion was the culmination of a conflict that has been brewing for several months. End summary.

THE INFRACTION

¶12. (C) The national leadership of the Union of Right Forces (SPS) has recently engaged in a public row with its Moscow city party leadership, which has culminated in the expulsion of SPS Moscow member and City Council Deputy Ivan Novitskiy. Novitskiy's ouster was triggered by his June 27 vote in the City Duma for President Putin's nomination of Yuriy Luzhkov to a fifth term as mayor of Moscow. In a July 2 conversation (reftel), SPS Federal Political Committee Chairman Nikita Belykh blamed the Moscow branch's "unruly" personalities for forcing the hand of the national leadership. On July 10, Novitskiy, the sole SPS deputy in the Moscow City Duma and leader of the Moscow SPS (MGO SPS), in turn blamed the domineering and overly regimented federal leadership for quashing his "more democratic" Moscow party organization. Sergey Mitrokhin, leader of the coalition Yabloko-United Democrats faction in the Moscow Duma that includes MGO SPS, joined Novitskiy in blaming the central SPS leadership for wanting control of the entire party apparatus.

¶13. (C) On June 27, the Moscow City Duma voted to approve Luzhkov as Putin's re-appointment as mayor of the city. The self-identified democratic parties (e.g., Yabloko and SPS) are strictly opposed to presidential appointments of governors and mayors preferring direct elections to such executive posts. However, both Novitskiy and Mitrokhin acknowledged that Luzhkov's popularity would ensure his election in any direct vote. They also noted in conversations with us that they preferred to work within the system as it stands. While not their choice for mayor, Luzhkov has professed positions that correspond to Yabloko and SPS positions; another Putin-appointed mayor may not hold such views. Finally, a vote against Luzhkov would only serve to harden the Kremlin against Yabloko and SPS. Novitskiy told us that previous votes by SPS members approving Putin-appointed governors had gone unsanctioned by the national leadership. Novitskiy cast his for vote Luzhkov.

In this instance, though, the national political committee of SPS had issued a directive to its party members the night before the vote in the Moscow Duma directing its party members to vote against Luzhkov's appointment. According to Novitskiy, no one notified him of the decision before he cast his vote.

¶4. (U) Frictions increased when the MGO SPS branch, against the wishes of the federal party, supported Other Russia's Dissenters' March. Members of MGO SPS took part in the Dissenters' March in Moscow carrying SPS flags even though the federal SPS had effectively banned participation. In March, the national party required MGO SPS to re-register its membership in order, according to the SPS leadership, to eliminate fictitious names. The local party saw this move more as an attempt to oust the internal opposition.

Novitskiy: Expelled or Not?

¶5. (U) On July 4, the national political committee of SPS expelled Novitskiy from the party. The committee identified his vote for Luzhkov as the offense requiring such drastic action. On that same day in the evening, at an already scheduled party meeting, the MGO SPS defied the national committee and reinstated Novitskiy.

¶6. (U) On June 21, the federal leadership of SPS had disbanded the MGO SPS leadership and took direct control of the city SPS apparatus. As reported in the press, Belykh considered the July 4 meeting of the Moscow party illegitimate as the local party was without leadership at the time. MGO SPS and the national leadership will likely

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continue their dispute into the fall.

A Democratic Party in the Best Soviet Model

¶7. (C) In a private conversation on July 10, Novitskiy described the current scandal as artificial. He disagreed that one vote should be considered a litmus test of party loyalty. He contended that democratic parties do not expel members for how they vote or for disagreeing with the national party bosses.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Such disputes within political parties anywhere are not uncommon. But those parties are generally large and well-established with a history of winning elections. SPS is small, with few deputies in the State and local Dumas. The negative coverage resulting from this spat will only make the party's path to the December elections more difficult.
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